DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 137 743 CS 003 346

AUTHOR Fleming, James T.
TITLE On the International Need for the Advanced Study of Reading.
PUB DATE Sep 76
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Reading Association of Ireland (Dublin, Ireland, September 23-25, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Reading; Cross Cultural Studies; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Literature Reviews; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Processes; *Reading Research; *Research Needs

ABSTRACT

In spite of the recognition accorded three-quarters of a century ago to the importance of the advanced study of reading, there still remain far too many individuals and institutions for whom reading, reading acquisition, and reading instruction are not yet established as areas of study worthy of the most serious, scholarly attention. The case for such advanced study must be made insistently, and informed priorities regarding aspects of reading most in need of investigation must be periodically established. Both basic and applied research are seen as necessarily related. Little progress is expected from studies reflecting a narrow focus and an absence of interdisciplinary efforts within the broadest context of international cooperation. (Author)

**********
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
**********

ED137743

# ON THE INTERNATIONAL NEED FOR THE ADVANCED STUDY OF READING

James T. Fleming, Professor and Chairman
Department of Reading
The University at Albany
1400 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12222, U.S.A.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

## Abstract

In spite of the recognition accorded three-quarters of a century ago to the importance of the advanced study of reading, there still remain far too many individuals and institutions for whom reading, reading acquisition, and reading instruction are not yet established as areas of study worthy of the most serious, scholary attention. The case for such advanced study must be made insistently, and informed priorities regarding aspects of reading most in need of investigation periodically established. Both basic and applied research are seen as necessarily related. Little progress is expected from studies reflecting a narrow focus and an absence of interdisciplinary efforts within the broadest context of international cooperation.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

James T. Fleming

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER"

Presented at the Reading Association of Ireland, St. Patrick's College, Dublin, Ireland, September 23-25, 1976.

CS 003 346

# ON THE INTERNATIONAL NEED FOR THE ADVANCED STUDY OF READING

James T. Fleming
The University at Albany

> 'And so to completely analyze what we do when we read would be the acme of a psychologist's achievements, for it would be to describe very many of the most intricate workings of the human mind, as well as to unravel the tangled story of the most remarkable specific performance that civilization has learned in all its history.' Edmund Burke Huey, The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1908, p. 6.

> 'We have some difficulty in this country convincing Universities that reading is a suitable study for higher degree work.' Dr. Elizabeth Goodacre, Consultant to the Center for the Teaching of Reading, Reading, England, personal communication, 4th March 1976.

The two citations above bring into sharp focus the related concerns of my paper: an appreciation of the complexity of the processes of reading, learning to read (Smith, 1971) and reading instruction (Smith, Goodman & Meredith, 1976) and the corresponding commitment to resolve through research some of the ambiguities surrounding these most basic human acts. What amounts to almost three-quarters of a century separating the two statements points up additionally the degree of my concerns. One is not restricted to personal communications, either, in coming across references to reservations by one or another group or institution regarding the relative worth of the advanced study of reading. John Downing (1975) and Donald Moyle (1975)

---

Presented at the Reading Association of Ireland, St. Patrick's College, Dublin, Ireland, September 23-25, 1976.

generally seem to echo Dr. Goodacre's sentiment in their respective reactions to the Bullock Report in the recent special issue of the UKRA journal, Reading. An example of similar points of view expressed in the United States can be found in the editorial comment of a recent issue of the Reading Research Quarterly. Citing a poling of individuals who had participated in a preconference (International Reading Association, New Orleans, 1974) institute on improving reading research, Roger Farr and Semuel Weintraub noted that although the "general response to the content of the institute was quite favorable--a number of the respondents regretted the emphasis on basics, having hoped for exposure to the more advanced aspects of reading research. This suggests that there is a potential demand for some seminar of this advanced nature (Farr and Weintraub, 1975:3)."

Acknowledging these well-put cases indicating the need for the advanced study of reading makes all the more unfortunate the fact that although the act of reading has served as the mode of data collection for much psychological research--to name but one area--the notion of reading as more than a vehicle for research in areas other than reading too often receives only limited support in some academic quarters. In short, there still are far too many individuals for whom reading, or at least one or another aspect of reading, is not yet established as a field of study worthy in its own right of the most serious, scholarly attention.

In this paper I cannot hope to document adequately the history of reading research support, even restricting my comments to efforts mounted in the United States. However, reference to some should indicate still further the need for broader and expanded, sustained support. There have been some expensive, federally funded projects which have not been all that fruitful; hopefully some suggestions from this paper reflecting the need for basic research might lead to more productive outcomes. All the notions are not novel, but all, I trust, merit a hearing or rehearing when one is seeking to understand reading.

As several have noted (Calfee, 1976; Gibson & Levin, 1975), there seems to be a great deal to say--and write and read--about how to teach reading, despite the fact that there is little known in any satisfying fashion about some very basic facets of reading. Note, for one example, the enormous number of new and revised representative texts on reading instruction which are published in the United States alone. Note also the tons of instructional material which are produced annually, as well as the vast array of articles published in journals. Most texts, instructional materials, and too many articles reflect no awareness of the findings of good reading research, much less indicate implications for the use of these results. There are some notable exceptions of course; Marie Clay's Reading: The Patterning of Complex Behavior (1972) is both rare and exemplary as a text on teaching reading which has as

its base much of her own fine research and that of others. What I have seen of the Open University materials developed in England under John Merritt's leadership and intended for reading teachers suggests a like, laudable source. As for the characteristics of much instructional material intended for young pupils, one has to hunt very diligently to find research-based support here. With journal articles, one interested in the advanced study of reading simply learns at an early age to be discriminating. Or to read very fast.

An overview of the status of reading research in the United States would show an uneven picture of progress in terms of usable research results; federally funded support also would be seen as uneven. Academic and professional school commitment would be seen as an older, more strongly sustained source of support: witness as one example the long-endowed William S. Gray Chair for Reading Research at the University of Chicago, one of the most prestigious private universities in America. In spite of severe financial difficulties being experienced by many institutions of higher education in the United States, one is heartened by the knowledge that there remains the sort of commitment necessary to satisfy the need for the advanced study of reading. This encouraging note is reflected in an advertisement which appeared in a 1976 issue of a major American educational research journal:

> The University of Delaware is seeking to fill a senior level position with a distinguished researcher in the psychology of reading. The position, a gift of the Unidel Foundation, is an endowed chair in the Department of Educational Foundations for someone with an important, and continuing basic research program in reading (American Educational Research Association Journal, 1976)

Only relatively recently has there been a shift to an interdisciplinary approach to the problems of basic reading research. Many of the advanced studies of reading conducted through the support of Project Literacy (Levin & Williams, 1970) significantly involved for the first time psychologists and linguists in cooperative efforts. Much of this research was initiated in the early 1960's. As with many attempts at interdisciplinary efforts, these basic studies frequently manifested the strengths of acknowledged leaders in their respective disciplines. They also pointed up, however, the strains to be found whenever cooperation is new and the points of view, methods of research and modes of analysis differ substantially across researchers. This state of affairs would be reflected through the end of the 1960's and into the 1970's, whether one looked at collections of papers aimed at illuminating aspects of reading processes (Goodman, 1968) or edited collections which tried to initiate links between, for example, findings in psycholinguistics and the teaching of reading (Goodman & Fleming, 1969).

In any discussion of advanced studies of reading conducted recently in the United States, at least three major, critical reviews of the research literature, all produced in the early 1970's, should be taken into account. The distinguished psychologist, John B. Carrol's, (1971) report to the National Academy of Education represented an attempt to set goals for needed reading research. So too were the Targeted Research

Program co-ordinated at Rutgers under the direction of John Davies (1971) and the Task Force report on Linguistic Communication sponsored by the International Reading Association, edited by George Miller (1973). Although all three took note of or involved some of the most talented linguists, psychologists and reading specialists, to name but a few groups, all three documents, nonetheless, could be termed "too diffuse", as Calfee (1976:42) has aptly noted. His extended comment on these reports is pertinent.

> They tended to be more 'basic' than applied--most dealt little if at all with regular classrooms. And none eventuated in a very clear statement of priorities in reading research (Calfee, 1976:42).

Reflecting the same spirit of concentrating on a small number of basic issues, the edited proceedings of two conferences, in the least, should be noted also. Language by Ear and by Eye, edited by Kavanagh & Mattingly (1972) has been extremely influential in focusing debate on the nature of the relationships between speech and reading and encouraging a continuing range of related research. Apart from its deserved influence, traceable in large part to the level of sophistication of the individual papers, one would be well-urged to give a most careful reading to Eleanor Gibson's prefactory remarks (Kavanagh & Mattingly, 1972: 3-19), complemented by George Miller's sobering reflections on the conference, many of which would have to be characterized as reflections of some wide-

ranging disappointment, noting in particular as he did the unnecessary narrowness of many of the concerns explored at the conference (Kavanagh & Mattingly, 1972:377). Others similarly have noted the absence of much attention, for example, to the semantic aspects of reading (Tuinman & Fleming, 1974).

Guthrie's (1976) editing of the conference proceedings of the Blumberg symposium reflects even more vividly the interdisciplinary nature of recent investigations of reading processes. This perhaps is most noticeable with respect to the neurological and affective variables pertinent to reading acquisition (Guthrie, 1976:3). Moreover, there is greater explicit attention given to research efforts involving disabled populations--those exhibitng various acquired reading disturbances.

In spite of these major contributions, Calfee's judgment of 'too basic,' at the cost of application, still stands, particularly if one looks for a sense of relatedness. This criticism should not be seen as disparaging ongoing and needed basic efforts aimed at resolving important questions about reading processes--whether the question involves notions of segmentation or phonemic recoding (Fleming, 1976), for example. Rather, the criticism should be regarded as constructive encouragement toward trying to broaden the context of investigations, where necessary, and, where possible, showing the relation of the research to the world of regular classrooms. What follows are some notions which represent areas in need of advanced study-areas which, if exploited carefully, may allow better for the understanding of reading in relation to reading instruction.

As many have observed lately, the areas of memory and comprehension in relation to reading suddenly are receiving attention after a long period of neglect; this is especially apparent as debate increases over the need to identify meaningful units in reading and reading acquisition, or as Frank Smith (1975) has put it, "on making sense."

With regard to systems of assessment, Calfee strongly suggests that "...we do not need new tests; we need new ways of testing (Calfee, 1976:43)." And on the over-use and misuse of correlational studies, he reminds us in timely fashion that "correlation is not causality; it is not true that it gets cold out at night because the stars come out (Calfee, 1976:46)." There is also ample evidence to support his view that there exists powerful and varied experimental techniques for both basic and applied research in reading. Ohnmacht (1970), for one, has had some insightful things to say with respect to individual differences in reading. More recently he and Weiss (Ohnmacht & Weiss, 1976) have shown in an interesting way how rigorous reading research may be conceptualized and conducted when accommodation is made to circumvent the typically depicted, static nature of the processes.

Another aspect of reading much in need of advanced study is, preferably in naturalistic settings, the documentation of the normal acquisition of reading. Not discounting the enormous methodological problems to be overcome, a strong case can be made for such an approach, given the great strides gained by

a similar approach in investigating children's acquisition of oral language (Brown, 1973). One of the only attempts to do for reading what has been done for oral language can be seen in the work of Ragnhild Söderbergh (1971) in her monograph [in English]" Reading in early childhood: a linguistic study of a Swedish preschool child's gradual acquisition of reading ability. Currently she is conducting some exciting work on normal hearing and deaf children's learning to read between the ages of two and five--a project which she reported on at the Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics in Washington, D.C. (March 11-13, 1976). Acknowledging the difficulties of such research, more efforts in kind should be encouraged. The number of case studies of reading disabilities we have on record speaks loudly for the current imbalance here.

In attempts to broaden the context of our advanced studies, all of which should bring more into line the realities of learning contexts--in that they hardly are limited to school settings, particularly formal settings--we would be well-advised to take note of some efforts, on the one hand, which have provoked a great deal of notice and, on the other, some which have yet to be very well developed. In the first instance, the long run of Sesame Street on American television networks stands as an example of an imaginative effort to put technology in the service of applying some very basic reading research findings (Lesser, 1974). In the second instance, efforts to

use the anthropologist's skills and insights in investigating reading processes, and particularly the processes of reading instruction, have only barely begun. McDermott's (1976) piece on illiteracy and social stratification, recently reprinted in the newly-revised second edition of Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading (Singer & Ruddell, 1976), stands out as an impressive source for increasingly important lines of research. In this same vein, one would wish for some productive incorporation of, for example, Sinclair et al.'s (1972) work [in England] on classroom discourse analysis in the development of observation systems to be used in classrooms where reading instruction is taking place. It seems possible that in this sense a more refined way of investigating the language of instruction could be developed, which in turn could well give us a much clearer picture of what might be termed the communicative context of reading instruction. This entire area remains as a rich source of some pioneering efforts, particularly when linked, for example, with notions of using the vernacular as the initial medium of instruction as Macnamara (1966) has explored in his work in Ireland.

In sum, these few areas which have been mentioned represent a biased sample of some directions for advanced study believed to offer some potential for more comprehensive, productive probes toward understanding reading than some others which have enjoyed almost our exclusive attention. Serious consideration of even a few should convince the harshest skeptic of the need to know more. More about reading, learning to

read, and instruction in reading. If one acknowledges both the paucity of our current knowledge along with the complexity of the tasks in our need to know, there ought to follow support for basic and applied efforts which should correspond in magnitude to the nature and scope of the challenge. I am convinced that no one group--no matter how solid or impressive the coalition--is capable of coming to terms adequately with all these tasks. Nor is one nation. Simply put, there is a need for more pioneers of research in reading (McCullough, 1976). If reading truly is to be considered an international concern, we must press harder to establish more broadly the case for its importance; only then will there be priority accorded to the need for advanced study. Hopefully the advanced study of reading then will reflect even more of a co-operative international effort than the promising works which already have brought together throughout the world those who seek to enhance opportunities for literacy within the broadest social context.

## References

Brown, R. A first language: The early stages. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973.

Calfee, R. A proposal for practical (but good) research on reading. Research in the Teaching of English, 1976, 10, 41-50.

Carroll, J. Report of the Committee on Reading of the National Academy of Education. Washington, D.C., 1971.

Clay, M. Reading: The patterning of complex behavior. Auckland, New Zealand: Heinemann Educational Books, 1972.

Davis, F. (Ed.). The literature of research in reading with emphasis on models. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers-The State University, 1971.

Downing, J. Theoretical overview. Reading. (A special issue on A Language for Life: Report of the Bullock Committee, edited by Derek Thackray for the United Kingdom Reading Association). 1975, 9, 7-13.

Farr, R. & Weintraub, S. A new volume on improving research. Reading Research Quarterly, 1975-76, 11, 3-4.

Fleming, J. Alternative interpretations of evidence for phonemic recoding in visual word recognition. Journal of Reading Behavior, 1976, 8, 7-18.

Gibson, E. & Levin, H. The psychology of reading. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1975.

Goodman, K. (Ed.). The psycholinguistic nature of the reading process. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1968.

Goodman, K. & Fleming, J. (Eds.). Psycholinguistics and the teaching of reading. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1969.

Guthrie, J. (Ed.). Aspects of reading acquisition. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Kavanagh, J. & Mattingly, I. Language by ear and by eye. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1972.

Lesser, J. Children and television: Lessons from Sesame Street by Joan Ganz Cooney (Introduction by Lloyd N. Morrisett.) New York: Random House, 1974.

Levin, H. & Williams, J. Basic studies on reading. New York: Basic Books, 1970.

Macnamara, J. Bilingualism and primary education. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1966.

McCullough, C. Pioneers of reading research. In Singer, H. & Ruddell, R. (Eds.). Theoretical models and processes of reading. (Second edition) Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1976, 389-428.

McDermott, R. Achieving school failure: An anthropological approach to illiteracy and social stratification. In Singer, H. & Ruddell, R. (Eds.). Theoretical models and processes of reading. (Second edition) Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1976, 389-428.

Merritt, J. Reading failure: a re-examination. In Southgate, V. (Ed.). Literacy at all levels. London: Ward Lock Educational, 1972, 175-184.

Miller, G. (Eds.). Linguistic communication: Perspectives for research. Report of the Study Group on Linguistic Communication to the National Institute of Education. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1973.

Moyle, D. Teacher education. Reading. (A special issue on A Language for Life: Report of the Bullock Committee, edited by Derek Thackray for the United Kingdom Reading Association). 1975, 9, 7-13.

Ohnmacht, F. Individual differences in reading. Reading: process and pedagogy. (Nineteenth Yearbook of the National Reading Conference: Milwaukee) 1970, 242-247.

Ohnmacht, F. & Weiss, F. Construct validity and reading research: some comments with a data simulation exemplar. Journal of Reading Behavior, 8, 1976, 19-25.

Sinclair, J., Forsyth, I., Coulthard, R., & Asby, M. The English used by teachers and pupils. Department of English, University of Birmingham (England): Final report to Social Science Research Council, August, 1972.

Singer, H. & Ruddell, R. (Eds.) Theoretical models and processes of reading. (Second edition) Newark, Delaware, International Reading Association, 1976, 389-428.

Smith, F. Understanding reading. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971.

Comprehension and learning. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975.

Smith, E., Goodman, K. & Meredith, R. Language and thinking in the elementary school. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston (revised edition), 1976.

Söderbergh, R. Reading in early childhood: a linguistic study of a Swedish preschool child's gradual acquisition of reading ability. Stockholm: University of Stockholm, Department of Scandanavian Languages, 1971.

Tuinman, J. & Fleming, J. Review of Language by ear and by eye. Edited by Kavanagh, J. & Mattingly, I. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1972, xiv 398 pp. in American Educational Research Journal. 11, 1974, 287-289.